

Two programs nip virus in bud

There's been a lot of talk lately about "computer viruses," those terrible programs that lie dormant within another program then suddenly awaken to reformat disks, destroy data or just wipe a hard disk clean.

These viruses are placed by unscrupulous people on public bulletin boards and have been known to invade programs on popular on-line services. Computer viruses are a serious threat to anyone who uses an on-line data-base service or down-loads programs from other computers.

There are three possible solutions for dealing with these programs. Unfortunately, none of them is foolproof or ideal:

- Don't down-load programs from on-line services.

- Only access commercial services that are known to be aware of computer viruses and are known to have taken precautions against them. Most of the well-known services have.

- Install security software on



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your computer that's designed to protect it from the viruses.

Such software is just coming onto the market. Two that I've looked at are Disk Watcher and Vaccine.

Disk Watcher, available for \$79.95 from RG Software Systems Inc. of Willow Grove, Pa., is a memory-resident program that constantly monitors your computer's operations for telltale signs of a virus in the works. It notifies you of any viral activity and allows you to stop any destructive action before it takes place.

Disk Watcher also provides two other useful everyday features. It provides a window to DOS while you're in any other program, and it alerts you when a disk is full. It al-

so lets you erase files and make room on your disk without leaving your current program. This is especially valuable when using programs that don't allow you to recover data-base and word processing programs when your disk is full.

Vaccine, available for \$189 from FoundationWare of Cleveland, checks executable files for bugs, errors, modifications or patches every time they are run. It also helps protect against disk writes that could destroy data and prevents others from altering your system set-up and batch files.

Vaccine also provides a safe place in your computer to test possibly dangerous software, and it allows you to easily recover erased or damaged data. Also, it lets you "lock" your hard disk when you leave the computer. And the publisher claims it will not conflict with other memory-resident programs.

Of course, there are perils to using this software. You have no

guarantee that the programs are not a placebo for computer virus fright, or even a bald-faced rip-off.

It would be useful if there were some independent testing of the programs to verify their usefulness. But as far as I know, there is no such testing service. So, if you install a protection package and never have a problem with computer viruses, you'll never know if the program worked — or if the bugs just never crossed your path!

The bottom line: There's no way to know whether the anti-computer virus program you install actually protects your system from destructive bugs. But I suggest you invest in one anyway, especially if you must use on-line computer services that put you at risk to computer viruses.

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